

PLAY TROUPE OF PORT WASHINGTON

presents

D O N J U A N I N H E L L

from

George Bernard Shaw's

MAN AND SUPERMAN

March 24, 1972

DON JUAN IN HELL:

George Bernard Shaw's restatement of the
"oldest problem of philosophy and religion"

Today the whole literate world is troubled by the questions that Shaw raised fifty years ago. Events have taught us that the fate of each man and the future of the race are permanently in jeopardy. What can we do about it? Don Juan in Hell addresses itself to the question by making a woman, her father, and her lover wrangle and justify themselves once the adventure of life is done. The Devil acts the part of Greek chorus or public opinion, but in Shaw's version he is no conventional stage figure; he spouts all the advanced liberal ideas. It is Dona Ana who is conventional--sincerely so, just as her father is conventional with hypocrisy. As for Don Juan, we are told that he is a sound thinker. We therefore watch four kinds of awareness at cross purposes, from the woman to the philosopher. Her business is childbearing, that is, embodying the Life Force. His is thought-bearing, or giving the Life Force direction and meaning.

In these terms Shaw restates for us the oldest problem of philosophy and religion: What is the purpose of life? But this is not the only theme of Don Juan in Hell. There is a second, contrasting and clashing with the first: What is the nature of happiness? Eager as he is for the Superman to come, Shaw does not forget that we are individuals living now and making personal claims on the universe. He shows us Dona Ana, who has banked on future gains by one sort of self-restraint, appalled at finding herself in Hell. But she can escape from it.

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THE CAST

Dona Ana. BETTY DAVENPORT

Don Juan. EDWARD CABOT

The Commander ROBERT FRIED

The DevilHENRY SENFT

Directed by HENRY SENFT

Lighting by KEVIN HICKSON

Sound recording by WILLIAM CALDERARO

For Shaw believes that Life is not preliminary to anything except possibly a more abundant life for our descendants. Heaven and Hell are here on earth, a permanently open choice. The blest are those who prefer effort to illusion and truth to enjoyment, who would live or die for an idea rather than live for their senses and in the fear of death. The damned take the path of least resistance, avoid thought, and surround themselves with nice things.

.....Out of a scientific dispute (over the purposefulness of evolution) and an emancipated view of woman, Shaw fashioned the greatest moral document of our century to date. It is not a question of agreeing with everything he says, but of being moved by his vision. And for this to happen he had to fuse scientific philosophy and ethical passion into a work of art -- which brings us back to the question whether Don Juan in Hell is real drama. We know it is paying theatre. But it is real drama because it shows a conflict about a real issue. Don Juan's damning catalogue of frauds is a challenge to every conscious being.

Yet it would be a mistake to find the truth exclusively in the Don's speeches. What the Devil says, what Ana feels, and what bothers the Commander -- all contain portions of wisdom. If not wholly right, all the characters are in the right -- which is the essence of lifelikeness and hence of dramatic presentation.

by JACQUES BARZUN

*From his jacket notes on the
First Drama Quartet recording*